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OPINION
GUEST ESSAY

Red and Blue America Will Never Be the Same

— and it's middle class voters who are responsible

Kevin Roberts / The New York Times

By Thomas B. Edsall
Thomas B. Edsall has covered politics from Washington, D.C., as politics, development and economics beat reporter for The Washington Post for 40 years. He is the author of "Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics" and "The Age of Austerity: The Crisis and the Future of Entitlement." He teaches at Columbia Journalism School and at the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University. Follow him on Twitter @tedsdigest and on his Substack page, Democracy Corner.

Donald Trump's dominance of the political stage for the past seven years galvanized what had been a slow-burning realignment, with Republicans increasingly dominant among voters in both the Democratic and Republican coalitions.

The support Trump received in racial communities and the animosity he provoked among well-educated suburbanites accelerated the ongoing inversion — an measure of income, education and geographic mobility — of white Democratic and Republican voters. (White voters make up 67 percent of the electorate.)

In 2016, according to Pizzagalli/Fox, a website that analyzes the demographics of American politics, Trump carried white voters with incomes below $50,000 by a margin of 64 to 28 percent, including 20 of the top 22 Democratic, Republican and Independent congressional districts with the lowest median household income. The median household income in districts represented by Democrats was $68,629, which is $18,224 more than the median for districts represented by Republicans, at $50,405.

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The 2016 data stands in contrast to the income patterns a half-century ago. In 1972, Republicans held 43 of the 100 highest-income districts and Democrats held 57 of the 100 lowest-income districts.

These trends prompted Nolan McCarty, a political scientist at Princeton, to comment in an email to me, that Republicans

are surely the party of the income degree — increasingly so among whites without a BA. Among those with a BA degree, the Republicans are the party of the associate degree (or no-college degree), also reflected that the Democrats but not nearly the polarization.

Richard Hanna, a law professor at N.Y.U., argued that

politics throughout the Western democracies is based on a cleavage between those who have a college degree and those who do not. Trump's support was concentrated in the former, but the Democratic coalition, Biden's base, is now the base of the political parties of the left was less affluent, but more educated than the Republican coalition. Democrats have lost their primary support among higher income, non-college educated voters.

Now, Pettiss continued, "we are witnessing the complete inversion of that pattern, and the question is whether this is a temporary or a long-enduring realignment of the political parties throughout the world."

In his email, Pettiss noted that in the 1960s

Democratic candidates received twenty-two points less support among voters with incomes in the top third than those in the bottom third (twenty-seven percent). By 2020, the gap had dropped to only six-point difference and in 2024, voters in the top third of income actually gave Harris more support than the Democratic candidates. Meanwhile, Republican voters across university degrees in the United States were twenty points less likely than those in the bottom third to vote for Trump, a difference and by 2024, those between graduate degrees were twenty points more likely than those in the bottom third to vote for Democrats.

The ramifications of these developments, which predate Trump's entry into presidential politics in 2015, Vasham throughout the electoral process in the United States," Pettiss argues.

Take the Electoral College, for most of the time from the 1880s to the 1960s, Democratic candidates received more than 100 electoral votes. In 2020, it suddenly became strongly Republican and Democratic candidates, and 2020 solid even more so this time.

At the same time, there are counter-developments more favorable to the left.

Nicholas Stephanopoulos, a law professor at Harvard who focuses on redistricting and demographic trends, argued in an email that "this country's political geography is now less geographically skewed. While "the conventional wisdom has it that Democrats are concentrated in cities, and Republicans are spread out over the countryside, the reality is that Democrats are concentrated in cities; "by contrast, "the Trumps seem to have changed the country's political geography in ways that are beneficial to Democrats."

Trump, Stephanopoulos continued,

similarly reduced the intracounty Democratic edge in cities, thus undoing some of this geology of Democratic voters. Trump also made inroads into the suburbs, which, of course, are where most of them are about a small and is so packed with Republicans in cities are blue. And Trump third support in the suburbs, so that the Democratic suburban advantage has shrunk. Overall, he turned the Democratic statistical disadvantage.

As a result, Stephanopoulos argued,

the U.S. House will be closer to ambiguous in partisan terms than it would have been in 2020 or even 2024 if the 2020 partisan geographies. When Alan Abramowitz and I wrote our paper, we interpretation additional variables like incumbency and polling, limits the likely force with the increased 7 percent pro-Democratic.

Republicans won 204 seats in 2020 despite the fact that Democrats had a 7-point advantage in the popular vote for House candidates, according to Stephanopoulos. Yet Tom Ellis's view that Republicans will win the national House vote by 7 percent in 2022, yet only pick up the same 20 seats they got in 2022.

Robert M. Stein, a political scientist at Rice University, agrees with Stephanopoulos and cites trends in Texas to show the pro-Democratic shift.

In the 2020 Texas Republican Party's redistricting plan in 2010 and in durability over the last decade, Democrats gained in 2020 Republicans held a 300 to 50 seat advantage in the Texas House of Representatives. By 2024, this margin had shrunk to 87 to 63 and twenty-nine seats. 2010, Democrats picked up House seats in Texas, Republicans picked up seven seats.

Democrats gained 12 seats in the Texas delegation, Republicans lost one seat. Democrats gained 13 seats in the Texas state legislature, Republicans lost one seat

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